



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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COUNTY, HEALTH CARE OFFICIALS ANNOUNCE LOCAL SMALLPOX PLAN

Officials available Friday, Dec. 13 to discuss preliminary details of vaccination policy

Following President George Bush's declaration of a federal smallpox vaccination policy, the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency, along with local hospital and other health care officials, will discuss the county's smallpox vaccination plan today.

"We don't know how great the threat of a smallpox attack is to our community, but it is possible," said Dr. Nancy Bowen, interim Public Health Officer. "We must be prepared in order to protect the public safety."

The plan involves the formation of volunteer response teams comprised of designated health care workers, Bowen said. These teams, based in acute care hospitals and the County Public Health Department, will care for victims, and investigate and control the spread of disease.

County clinic sites for vaccination of hospital health care workers will be identified in the next two weeks, with vaccination expected to begin in mid- to late January, as directed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Side effects from the smallpox vaccine can be serious, but the disease itself is so devastating that officials decided to first vaccinate health care workers, Bowen said. Vaccine may be available to the general public in 2004.

All of San Diego County's acute care hospitals have estimated the number of health care workers in their organizations who would volunteer for vaccination, said Dan Gross, chair, Healthcare Association Disaster Preparedness Task Force and CEO, Sharp Memorial Hospitals.

The health care workers will include staff from emergency departments, intensive care units and other inpatient units, and other health professional and support staff, he said.

"Over the next month, we will conduct intensive training to staff who volunteer to be vaccinated," he said.

The County has ordered 3,300 doses of vaccine.

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